

MULTIFUNCTIONAL NCOs: A VIBRANT CAPABILITY



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Efforts in meeting the challenges of military logistics have always been tied with innovative approaches to training. Developing a multifunctional program that prepares a senior noncommissioned officer (NCO) to perform in a multi-echelon environment across the spectrum of combat service support (CSS) operations requires new thinking and career management oversight.

Early last year, the Commander of the US Army Combined Arms Services Command (CASCOM), Fort Lee, Virginia sent a survey to the field to obtain input on the feasibility of a multifunctional NCO. The survey targeted senior NCOs and officers from eight major commands. Two fundamental questions provided the framework for the survey. Do we need a multifunctional NCO in our Army? Why should a multifunctional NCO not exist? It was not surprising to find out that almost 90 percent of the respondents agreed that the Army needed a multifunctional NCO.

Developing multifunctional NCOs is not a new concept. The Quartermaster Corps introduced the NCO career development program in 1955 to train and develop NCOs with broad technical and operational knowledge in two or more logistics functions. The NCO Logistics Program (NCOLP) provided a central control point in the continental United States for enlisted Soldiers who had become qualified in depot supply and maintenance activities through experience and training gained by working with the supply

system in Europe. The NCOLP course covered 42 tasks and placed emphasis on maintenance, munitions, supply, and transportation.

The Signal Corps established a NCO career development program in 1957 similar to that of the Quartermaster Corps. The Deputy Chief of Staff for Logistics, Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), organized a technical service career development program in 1961 to encompass the Quartermaster and Signal Corps career development programs and to provide for similar programs in other technical services. The technical services programs were incorporated into one DA program in July 1962.

The course was taught at the US Army Quartermaster Center and School in the Logistics Career (LOGCAR) Department. LOGCAR was responsible for training officers, warrant officers, and NCOs. The course trained an average of 100-200 Soldiers per fiscal year (FY) with graduates earning the "K" skills qualification identifier (SQI). At that time, Army Regulation 614-200 authorized commanders to request the classification of duty positions within the logistics related military occupational specialty (MOS) as logistician "K" positions. Only those NCOs possessing the highest personal and professional abilities were selected from 34 logistics MOSs in 9 career management fields. NCOLP was voluntary and program candidates were selected by a HQDA NCOLP selection board.

The course was a nine-week resident, with a non-resident correspondence course version offered by the US Army Training Support Center, Fort Eustis, Virginia. The non-resident course was designed solely for Reserve Component (RC) NCOs, and was a requirement prior to attending the two-week RC resident course for full certification. The NCOLP course and the “K” identifier ended in FY92 when CASCOM earmarked training courses at the US Army Logistics Management Center (ALMC), Fort Lee, for NCOs assigned to specific logistics positions as well as the implementation of the Battle Staff Course and the Support Operations Course.

Currently, there are other programs of instruction being taught at the ALMC that equips students with the skills and knowledge necessary to perform duties as NCOs or DA civilians in a multifunctional CSS environment. CASCOM realized that producing multifunctional NCOs in a faster and streamlined way will better meet the need for managing the constant challenge of Army logistics, especially during the global war on terrorism.

New efforts are on the way to determine what type of training is needed and at what level. The Noncommissioned Officer Education System will play an important role in the process since the multifunctional course itself might be embedded in all CSS Advanced Noncommissioned Officer Courses’ programs of instruction. This approach is just one of many courses of action being considered. The ALMC is working very hard in revising the content of the multifunctional courses and it is likely that one or two new courses will begin during this FY.

Last but not least, how should we manage the multifunctional NCO population. Having visibility of the SQIs and the positions coded as multifunctional will require close monitoring by the US Army Human Resources Command, as well as all the CSS proponent offices. CASCOM is asking proponents to identify multifunctional NCO positions in our force structure. The constant and often major doctrinal

changes required to support a changing force are being set in motion once more to support the logistical requirements of our Army. It is evident that a once good idea is reemerging and needs the input from all of us to maximize its utility to our logistics capabilities and profession.

“War is both a physical reality and a state of mind. War is ambiguous, uncertain, and unfair. When we are at war, we must think and act differently. We become more flexible and more adaptable. We must anticipate the ultimate reality check - combat. We must win both the war and the peace. We must be prepared to question everything. What is best for the Nation? What must endure? What must change?”

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